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Yorktown 3,660 (224)

Village of Ossining

3,608 (136)

Peekskill 3,453 (107)

Cortlandt 3,079 (152)

Somers 1,677 (83)

Croton-on-Hudson

682 (27)

Town of Ossining 514 (15)

Buchanan 219 (5)

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Covering Yorktown, Somers, Cortlandt, Croton-on-Hudson, Buchanan, Ossining and Peekskill

FREE

March 2 - March 8, 2021

SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

Volume 13, Issue 584



Home Destroyed by Blaze

A home on Sprout Brook Road in the Continental Village section of Cortlandt was destroyed by an early morning fire on February 23. The blaze was difficult for firefighters to battle since the home was located up an inclined driveway that was covered with snow and ice. Firefighters from Continental Village, Lake Mohegan and Croton were among the emergency personnel who responded to the scene.

Lakeland Unveils Plan for In-Classroom Return

By Rick Pezzullo

Lakeland School District officials have responded to an outcry from parents to return students to the classroom by unveiling a plan that would implement in-person learning four days a week in early April.

During a lengthy meeting Thursday night in the Lakeland High School auditorium, Superintendent of Schools Brendan Lyons, who earlier in the day penned a letter to the community outlining his proposal, said a survey would be circulated from March 1-8 asking parents if they preferred having students back in school or continue remote learning until the end of the school year.

"This is where we need our community to be active partners," Lyons said. "I believe the best place for students to learn is in our classrooms. But we are most responsible for the health and safety of our students and staff."

Approximately 540 parents signed a petition that was sent to Lyons and the Board

of Education and more than 600 people joined a Facebook page calling for schools to open.

"It's not working. These kids need to go to school," Marianne Kolesar, a parent of three students in the district who is also a teacher, remarked at Thursday's marathon meeting. "It's heartbreaking."

For the four-day-a-week, in-person option to be possible (Wednesdays would be used as a flex day), Lyons maintained the district seeks to meet two metrics. Using the seven-day rolling average for Westchester County, the coronavirus positivity rate must remain below 5%. In addition, the district is targeting 70% or more of its faculty and staff to be fully vaccinated.

He said a recent survey of staff, which generated 718 responses, 58% stated they had already received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine or had scheduled an appointment.

"When our district physician, Dr. Louis

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Progress 4 Peekskill Slate Launches Campaign to Defeat Dems

By Rick Pezzullo

The four candidates that formed Progress 4 Peekskill to challenge the slate selected by the city's Democratic Committee officially launched their campaign Friday evening.

More than 90 people tuned in on Zoom to listen to the ideas of mayoral candidate Conor Greene, current Peekskill Councilwoman Vanessa Agudelo and trustee hopefuls Amy Vele and Amy Perlow.

The foursome is gearing up

for a June 22 primary against a majority of the Democratic district leader's choices: Councilwoman Vivian McKenzie for mayor, incumbent councilmen Ramon Fernandez and Dwight Douglas, and political newcomer Rob Scott, who owns a downtown juice bar.

"My loyalty is not to a party, it's to the people," said Agudelo, who in 2017 made his

tory as the youngest person to be elected to the council and has often clashed with her Democratic colleagues on policy issues.

"Right now, the way City Hall is operating only a few people have the information and everyone else is in the dark," Agudelo asserted.

"By watching the Common Council, people can see not all Demo-

crats are made the same. When my colleagues begin to sense there is criticism, instead of bringing their (residents) voices in, they close the door and use the pandemic as an excuse for public (input) not to be heard. That is a sad excuse."

Greene, co-founder and board chair of Peekskill Walks, a resident-led nonprofit advocating for safer streets and healthier neighborhoods, stressed government needs to be responsive to the residents it serves.

"I really believe that local government can make people's lives better," said Greene, who was born in Dublin, Ireland. "A lot of people really feel disconnected from City Hall and their elected officials. A lot of people out there don't know how to access services."

Vele currently serves as a Legislative Aide for Westchester County Legislator Colin Smith and served as Campaign Manager for the Democratic Party in 2019. Per-

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Progress 4 Peekskill Slate Launches Campaign to Defeat Dems

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low has been a Peekskill resident since 2013 and has spent her career fighting for school equity, working alongside nonprofits and public schools to increase the percentage of Black, Latinx, and low-income students who graduate from New York City schools prepared for the future. She is also a founding member of the Peekskill Equitable Housing Coalition, a group committed to halting the gentrification of Peekskill by ensuring the city's housing policies and agreements are in the best interest of current residents.

"People deserve to be heard and to be seen," said Vele, a lifelong city resident. "Our campaign will bring a lot of young

energy. Leadership is having the political courage to step up when necessary. Taking the unconventional route is often necessary to make change."

"This community is this slate," Perlow said. "Running for office is not something I thought I would do, but I was dismayed only to hear one person on the council (Agudelo) speaking out."

Greene emphasized housing was "at the core" of the Progress 4 Peekskill agenda, along with equitable growth.

"We need to develop on our own terms," said Greene, who vowed his slate would be putting forth a "bold, aggressive housing policy."

"We're not scared to talk about the housing crisis," said Agudelo, who maintained Peekskill was in the worst shape of any municipalities in northern Westchester with a high rate of foreclosures and rent-burdened tenants.

It was announced during the kickoff that Progress 4 Peekskill had received the Working Families Party endorsement.

However, in an email to the slate Monday, Peekskill Democratic Committee Chairperson Drew Claxton urged the candidates not to run as a third-party ticket if they were defeated in the primary.

"My first and foremost priority is to ensure the Democrats win general elections.

That means, regardless of the outcome of the June 22 primary election, Democrats need to be united in November," Claxton wrote. "I note with the concern the repeated statements made at your campaign launch that you intend to give voters 'a second bite at the apple' using a third-party line should you lose the primary. A third-party bid to protest the outcome of the Democratic primary made do irreparable harm to our collective effort to advance progressive, forward-looking policy in Peekskill."

"Look no further than the national election of 2016 to understand the damage that could be done if Democrats fail to unite," Claxton added.

Provision in Proposed Overlay Law in Yorktown Raises Eyebrows

By Rick Pezzullo

A provision in a proposed Overlay District Law in Yorktown that could give the Town Board the flexibility to limit public hearings has come under fire from a citizens group.

The Committee for a Sound Plan for Soundview denounced the stipulation in the latest draft of the Overlay District Law following a work session discussion that was held last week.

"That the Town Board would even consider such a provision is

a shocking betrayal of the public and one more indication that the board is pushing through the Unicorn project without regard for what its constituents want," stated Dr. Regina Kaishian, a member of the Committee who has spoken out on the mixed-use project planned on the former Soundview Preparatory School property on Underhill Avenue.

According to Committee spokesperson Trish Sullivan-Rothberg, in addition to opposing the optional hearing provision, the citizens group plans to ex-

pand the scope of its grassroots campaign designed to convince the Town Board that rezoning the property for an appropriate multi-family density and without any commercial development is in the best interests of the town.

"We accept the reality that there will be changes on the Soundview site. But if there's going to be change, let it be a well thought out change. A change that's good for the neighborhood, the town and the developer," Sullivan-Rothberg said. "The current Unicorn Contracting plan for 165

units is too dense for the site, and with so much vacant commercial space in the Heights there's no need for 20,000 square feet of additional commercial space."

However, Yorktown Supervisor Matt Slater explained the recent amendments to the overlay zone legislation were made after a collaborative process that included public comments, the Town Board and the town's planning staff.

"From the New York State Planning Federation to the Business Council of Westchester, economic

development and planning experts have identified overlay districts as an important tool for communities across our region and state," Slater said. "Yorktown's overlay zone plan has been called a model for other towns to emulate and we are continuing to refine our legislation to ensure it encourages growth, while protecting the suburban character of our community. The Planning Board approval process already requires two public hearings to be held and this legislation will provide the Town Board with the flexibility to hold a third."

Hearings Held on Transfer of Indian Point License to Holtec

By Rick Pezzullo

The New York State Public Service Commission held two virtual public hearings last week regarding the change of ownership of the Indian Point nuclear power plants in Buchanan.

Entergy, the owners of the three reactors and surrounding land for the last 17 years, and Holtec International submitted a license transfer application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on November 22, 2019. This would facilitate a change in ownership of the plant from Entergy to Holtec once Indian Point is completely shut down at the end of April.

Holtec would then carry out all of the activities to decommission the plant, store the spent nuclear fuel, and restore the site to its original condition. The decommissioning is expected to take about 15 years.

In January 2017, Entergy announced, to the complete surprise of local leaders, its plan for the early and orderly shutdown of Indian Point as part of a settlement with New York State and Riverkeeper.

The closure of Indian Point, the region's largest employer with about 1,000 full-time workers and contractors, will result in an annual revenue loss of \$32 million.

The Hendrick Hudson School District is preparing for the largest jolt, \$24 million, which represents 33% of its annual budget. The Village of Buchanan is set to lose 46% (\$4 million) of its budget. The Town of Cortlandt will experience an \$800,000 shortfall, Westchester County \$4 million, the Verplanck Fire District

\$372,703 (64% of its budget) and the Hendrick Hudson Free Library \$394,110 (28%).

"We will continue to monitor this next chapter and will always be an advocate for additional resources to offset our losses of tax revenue and good jobs," Cortlandt Supervisor Linda Puglisi said during last week's hearing. "This will be a long journey that the current local officials and those in the future must continue."

Other local elected officials were more critical of Holtec's history of problems in certain places it has operated and urged the PSC to deny the license transfer.

Peekskill Councilwoman Kathie Talbot maintained she had "serious concerns about Holtec," while fellow councilwoman Vanessa Agudelo stressed there were other options that should be explored.

"Holtec is not a company that can be trusted with the decommissioning process," Agudelo said. "It's unnecessary to put our community at risk with this risky transaction."

Peekskill resident and Democratic district leader Tina Volz-Bongar insisted Holtec was "unfit" to hold the license and lacked the finances necessary to do the job right, remarking, "Holtec is really making this up as it goes along."

However, Holtec had its share of supporters, particularly from current Entergy employees at Indian Point.

Lou Lubrano, who has worked at Indian Point for more than 30 years, said Holtec has agreed to hire more than 300 current Entergy employees who want to remain in the Hudson

Valley region and be part of the decommissioning effort.

"Holtec is a world class decommissioning company which has developed expertise, experience and techniques to safely and effectively decommission nuclear power plants, all while ensuring public safety," Lubrano said. "This is good news for the community and the employees. Decommissioning the site in such a short time frame as opposed to 40 years in the future means that there will be a great deal of economic activity at the site in the next decade. This will benefit the community in many

ways."

"Holtec brings experience, innovation and expertise in the area of decommissioning, with a strategic plan to release the site for reuse sooner than if Entergy continued to own the facility," said Jennifer Bakker, a nuclear professional at Indian Point since 2011. "I am proud to have been part of Entergy's legacy and honored to be a part of Indian Point's future while protecting our community and our environment. I urge you to support this synergetic team to give Indian Point a future."

L Lakeland Unveils Plan for In-Classroom Return

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Corsaro, certifies that the metrics have been met,

all students could attend school four days a week," Lyons stated in his letter. "The district will reconfigure classrooms to provide three feet of space between desks and each desk will have a three-sided plastic barrier, a protocol permitted by the New York State Department of Health. In addition, every pre-K-12 classroom will have an air purifier."

Corsaro, who has been the district's physician for the last eight years and also represents 13 other districts, not being in

school takes an emotional toll on students.

"It's time to make decisions on what's best educationally for our schools," he said. "I think Lakeland is in an excellent position to consider this move."

Trustee Robert Mayes said he would like students to be in schools five days a week.

"I don't think the plan goes far enough. The students will perform better if they're in the classroom," he said to much audience applause. "I think schools should be the last thing to close and the first thing to open."

Board President Michael Daly agreed, saying, "I think we need to move full speed ahead towards reopening."

State Looks to Open Additional Vaccination Sites for Seniors

By Anna Young

Seniors could soon have an easier time accessing COVID-19 vaccine appointments with facilities opening statewide specifically for those 65 and up.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that officials will partner with local health departments to open vaccination sites for seniors across the state. Certain facilities will also provide transportation assistance to New Yorkers and special support for paperwork regarding their vaccination.

Cuomo said the state will begin receiving an increased supply of the Moderna vaccine from the federal government starting this week to support this effort.

"We know that our senior New Yorkers are more at-risk with COVID, and it's critical that we provide them with access to the vaccine right in their own communities, as well as the assistance they need to schedule and get to and from their appointments," Cuomo said. "By working together with our local health departments to establish these sites, we will help ensure the process of receiving a vaccine is as simple as possible for our 65-plus population and get closer to reaching our goal of social equity and fairness through vaccine distribution."

It wasn't immediately known if Westchester or Putnam counties will be home to any of these additional state-run facilities, but vaccine allocation will be increased at area pharmacies servicing the senior population, with pop-up clinics planned for distribution.

Westchester County currently has three vaccination facilities – one that is state-run and two that the county oversees. The County Center in White Plains opened on Jan. 13 as the area's first state-run mass distribution vaccine site, with the Department of Health clinic and Westchester Community College also serving the eligible population.

Westchester County has directly administered 74,757 vaccines to eligible New Yorkers at the County Center. The clinic and WCC sites have inoculated 13,906 individuals.

Another mass distribution site will open this week in Yonkers, but it will only cater to Yonkers residents.

"There have been more vaccines available through the federal government than was true a month ago and we hope that number is going to continue to grow," Westchester County Executive George Latimer said. "The signs are hopeful and it's moving in the right direction, but we're nowhere near out of this thing yet and we want to be measured and careful."

Latimer called the roughly six-week diminution in COVID-19 data encouraging but is still cautious to label the activity a trend with a high number of infections still being recorded daily.

While the active cases, fatalities and hospitalizations are much lower compared to what they were during the holiday season, Latimer said that the county isn't yet in the clear. He reminded folks that the area has seen cases decline significantly only for infections to ramp up.

"The number of fatalities, the number of hospitalizations and the number of total active cases have continued in the downward

direction, good news, but it is a slow and steady reduction," Latimer said. "It is not a dramatic reduction and we're not at the point yet where we can any way assume that we are out of this."

Cases of COVID-19 increased by 370 on Monday, bringing the total number of positives to 107,857 since the start of the pandemic. There are now 6,041 active cases, a roughly 500 decrease over last week.

The total test positivity rate is 4.39 percent, with 8,429 tests administered Saturday. Overall, more than two million COVID-19 tests have been dispensed in Westchester in nearly a year.

Four more deaths were reported on Monday, bringing the COVID-19-related death toll to 2,101. There were 47 virus deaths last week, with 425 since Jan. 1.

As of last Friday, there were 340 virus patients in Westchester hospitals, a significant decline compared to the start of February when hospitalizations neared 600.

"We are not in any jeopardy of our system being overtaxed with the downward slope in infection, all of which is good. We're still at a stable point," Latimer said.

Putnam County's total caseload reached 8,369, with 29 additional positive cases recorded on Monday. The daily positivity rate

is 3.78 percent, with 768 tests administered on Saturday. Active cases stood at 458.

There have been 86 coronavirus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic, state data shows, with 18 fatalities in 2021.

Statewide there were 6,235 new positive cases on Monday, with the daily positivity rate clocking in at 3.58 percent.

Eighty additional COVID-19-related fatalities have brought the death toll to 38,557.

Statewide hospitalizations stand at 5,307. Across New York there have been 1,636,680 positive coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic.

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Pugh Heads Democratic Slate of Incumbents in Croton-on-Hudson

By Anna Young

Mayor Brian Pugh will seek a third term representing the Village of Croton-on-Hudson this November, as two incumbents look to continue their tenure on the Board of Trustees.

Pugh last week received the support of the Croton Democratic Committee and the Working Families Party, along with Trustees Sherry Horowitz and John Habib. Pugh, who was first elected in 2017, is a lifelong village resident who served on the Board of Trustees prior to his stint as mayor.

With the Nov. 2 election, Pugh said it's imperative that officials continue to work together to overcome the current health crisis and move the village forward.

"Facing the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge few could have imagined, but working with our community, the Board of Trustees has helped see the village government through the challenge, conserving our village's financial resources while ensuring that essential services are delivered," Pugh said.

"Now we must work together to build back better by making the capital investments in equipment that our first responders need, completing infrastructure projects like Croton Point Avenue, expanding our tax base and creating new housing opportunities that are accessible at all income levels."



Croton-on-Hudson Mayor Brian Pugh, second from left, will lead a full ticket of Democrats in this year's village election in November, that's comprised of John Habib, left, and Sherry Horowitz. They are pictured with County Executive George Latimer.

Horowitz will vie for a third two-year term after being first elected to the board in 2017. The longtime resident is a small business owner in Croton, the founder of Childrenspace, a preschool education center that has provided care to youngsters

for over 40 years.

If re-elected, Horowitz said she has a vision that combines the warmth and friendliness of a small town with the promise of a progressive and engaged community. She hopes to continue her

pursuit in reducing the village's carbon footprint, developing workforce and mixed-income housing, and finding opportunities to create a village that residents are proud to live in.

"At this time, when we are being encouraged to reimagine our institutions, I am excited about the unique opportunities we've been given to continue creating the village we want to see," she said. "I am proud to continue pursuing a progressive agenda for the village I love and represent."

Habib, who was elected to the board two years ago, owns a law firm in Westchester County and has managed other active firms across the nation and overseas throughout his 30-year career as an attorney. He is hoping to serve a second term, saying that it's been an honor to have had the chance to assist in the development of his hometown.

"I'm particularly proud to contribute my previous experience managing chambers of commerce toward helping our local business community relaunch the Croton Business Council," Habib said. "I look forward to working collaboratively with the board and Croton's businesses and residents to revitalize the local economy as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic."

It is unknown at this time if the Croton Republican Party will nominate challengers for the Nov. 2 election.

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Harckham, Mayer Call for State to Increase Child Care Funding

By Martin Wilbur

State senators Peter Harckham (D-Lewisboro) and Shelley Mayer (D-Yonkers) vowed last week to fight for hundreds of millions of additional dollars to help fund child care centers, many of which have struggled through the pandemic.

Joined by parents and advocates outside the Mount Kisco Child Center last Friday, the two legislators called on their colleagues and Gov. Andrew Cuomo to support a series of actions that would open up slots for additional children and pay the facilities a greater sum.

The most significant proposal would be a \$485 million funding increase in the 2021-22 state budget. The proposed executive spending plan maintains child care funding at its existing level, which the senators described as inadequate. By boosting funding, it would create more openings for children, limit co-pays and revise eligibility requirements, allowing more parents to receive subsidies.

Harckham said without affordable and accessible child care for working families, the economy will not fully recover once the state fully emerges from the wrath of the pandemic.

"Child care is not only good for people that are working, it is an investment to keep people productive and contributing to the economy versus having to go on much more expensive mandated services," Harckham said.

'Child care is in crisis and help has to come right away.'

—KATHY HALAS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CHILD CARE COUNCIL OF WESTCHESTER.

The additional money would allow for cost-of-living raises for staff, raise the fee level from 69 percent back to 75 percent of market rate where it had previously been set and pay providers for a portion of the days when children are absent because of illness or holidays.

Mayer said the fight to obtain needed funding for child care centers and helping working families has been a decades-long battle in New York. Without the help, women, particularly those with young children, may be forced to leave the workforce, she said.

The issue is also emerging as a priority at every level of government.

"So this is a moment of opportunity," said Mayer. "We are not in an attrition mindset; we need to be in an investment mindset. This is a chance to reset our priorities, invest in child care. Our kids deserve it."

Kathy Halas, executive director of the Child Care Council of Westchester, said while the governor's proposed budget has not cut child care for the upcoming year, that



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

State Sen. Peter Harckham, accompanied by state Sen. Shelley Mayer and child care advocates and parents, urge the state to sharply increase child care funding in the upcoming budget.

level is insufficient. Significant contributions from the state and federal governments are critical.

"Child care is in crisis and help has to come right away," Halas said.

Harckham said raising the income eligibility threshold is a key piece of his and Mayer's actions. Two spouses who work full-time at minimum wage would not qualify for child care assistance, he said. The annual gross income cut-off to receive subsidies is \$52,300.

Losing the subsidy is a constant fear for Maciel Burgos, who has a child attending the Mount Kisco Child Care Center and works for CareMount Medical in Katonah. Burgos said she never received financial help before starting a family and learning that child care

is prohibitively expensive.

"I'm at the top of the eligibility scale right now and I live in fear that I might lose it," she said. "Without subsidies, I could not afford to send my child to a place like Mount Kisco (Child Care)."

Many facility operators have also been financially stressed during the past year. Howard Milbert, executive director of the Ossining Children's Center, called the crisis since last year "the most challenging of my career." Milbert has led Ossining Children's Center for more than 35 years.

He said while child care centers were mandated to remain open, enrollment has plunged about 30 percent because many families have been fearful to send their children.

"The COVID crisis has forced us to go back to our donors two and three times for scholarship assistance," Milbert said. "Working families should not have to rely on the generosity of their neighbors to make their child care affordable. That is the job of government."

Should federal stimulus money arrive from Washington, Harckham urged the governor and his legislative colleagues to supplement the state's share, not replace it. Others hope enough lawmakers recognize their plight.

"Maybe this is the year where we'd be able to provide appropriate funding and it will become close to a reality," said Mount Kisco Child Care Center Executive Director Dawn Mayerski.

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Westchester Sports Hall of Famer Charged With Possessing Child Porn

By Anna Young

Westchester Sports Hall of Fame inductee Richard Leaf could spend up to 30 years in prison after he was arrested last week for possessing videos and images containing child pornography.

Leaf, a 72-year-old Somers resident, who is also known as “The Voice of the Westchester County Center,” was charged in federal court in White Plains last Wednesday with one count of receiving child pornography, which carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison and a maximum sentence of 20 years, and one count of possessing child pornography.

That latter charge carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, according to the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York.

“Richard Leaf is alleged to have engaged in deeply disturbing sexual communications with minors, and in being in possession of child pornography,” U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said. “Child pornography inflicts immeasurable damage upon innocent victims, and this Office and our FBI partners will continue to exhaustively detect, identify, and charge any individuals engaged in this sinister conduct.”

Between March 2019 and April 2020, Leaf posed as a teenager named Alex Bronson to communicate via Skype with a minor, who Leaf believed was 15 years old, officials said. During these conversations, the minor sent Leaf a video of himself masturbating in the shower and a fully nude photo of himself in the bedroom.

In addition, law enforcement officers



RAY GALLAGHER PHOTO

Richard Leaf, right, a longtime referee and the announcer for Section 1 basketball tournaments at the County Center for nearly 40 years, was arrested last week and charged with two criminal counts connected with receiving and possessing child pornography.

uncovered almost a dozen images and videos containing child pornography on Leaf's home computer.

Officials said that Leaf also created fictitious accounts on Chat Avenue, an online chatroom

website, and Skype to communicate with minors. The username of some of Leaf's fictitious accounts include alex bronson; 15; alex15; 15brandon; 914; 14; austinf19; williams.23; dan77771; 7; and Austin A.

“As our society continues to become more reliant on technology, more of our children are exposed to the most despicable predators – those searching out (the) young to sexually exploit them,” FBI Assistant Director William F. Sweeney Jr. said. “As we allege in this case, Mr. Leaf used Skype to chat with his victims, I'd like to stress to parents that although these contacts may occur in a virtual world, they harm your children in the real world.”

He added that predators inflict lasting damage to their victims, and both parents and guardians need to be aware of the dangers their children face.

Leaf had been the announcer for the Section 1 boys and girls basketball tournaments for nearly 40 years. He was also the announcer for Iona College men's and women's basketball, Scarsdale and Mamaroneck basketball and numerous tournaments.

In addition, he officiated youth soccer dating back to 1981 and had previously served as president of the Westchester-Putnam Approved Soccer Officials Association.

Strauss praised the efforts of the FBI and its Westchester County Safe Streets Task Force. She added that the investigation is ongoing. The case is being handled by the office's White Plains Division. Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Ong is overseeing the prosecution.

If anyone has information to report or interacted or sent underaged photos or videos of a sexual nature to any of the above accounts, please contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation at 1-800-CALL-FBI.

His two tiny babies spent twelve days in Northern Westchester Hospital's Level III NICU, the highest possible level Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in a community hospital.

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State Senate Seeks to Put Clamps on Utilities With Proposed Bills

By Martin Wilbur

The state Senate passed a collection of legislation last week aimed at holding utilities and telecommunications companies accountable for failed storm-related response and restoration efforts.

Legislation introduced by Sen. Shelley Mayer (D-Yonkers) would eliminate the \$100,000 cap on fines for each violation related to poor response on the part of the utilities and would mandate that telecommunications firms file an emergency response plan that must be approved by the Public Service Commission (PSC).

Two additional key provisions in Mayer's bill removes the ability for utilities to argue that they "reasonably" complied with the law and to restructure the processes by which the PSC determines a penalty, including by instituting a list of factors that cause a utility violation. The list of factors includes the extent of storm preparation for which there was advance warning, including whether the company made sufficient use of mutual aid resources, whether a violation was recurring and the scope of damages caused by a violation.

Mayer is hopeful that by hitting utilities in the pocketbook, the shareholders will hold the companies and their leadership accountable.

"My bill really puts teeth into what they can do because getting rid of the cap and forcing them to have a hearing and look at all these factors, they're going to have to impose fines, and stiff fines, and there'll be consequences," said Mayer, whose legislation



State Sen. Shelley Mayer saw her bill approved last week in the Senate that seeks to hold utilities and telecommunications companies accountable for storm-related failures. Lawmakers also passed a wide-ranging package of bills aimed at improving service and response.

was largely inspired by bitter complaints from constituents. "The shareholders, I think, when you remove the cap, will lean on the executives to do better."

The bill was approved 43-20 strictly along party lines. Mayer said she was confident that the Assembly would pass the legislation as well.

However, her measure, to some extent, is competing against a proposal from Gov.

Andrew Cuomo which threatens state takeover of utilities that fail to perform.

One of the challenges that Mayer faced was placing restrictions on telecommunications companies because they are largely regulated by the federal government. However, the state can require an emergency response plan be filed and approved by the PSC, similar to what is required of the power companies.

"I think my bill is a big step forward," she said. "It took a lot of work to find a path."

Last week, the Senate also approved a package of 10 bills in a wide-ranging piece of legislation. The bills concentrate on adding safety and regulation to protect consumers.

"Protecting the rights of utility customers is essential as the increasing number of severe storms continues to cause outages across the state," said Sen. Peter Harcham (D-Lewisboro), who supports the bill. "These bills will provide greater oversight and accountability, while also making utility companies financially liable to customers when laggard storm responses cause spoiled food and medicines."

Key provisions include:

- **Utility Moratorium.** Extends the moratorium on utility shut-offs until Dec. 31 or when the COVID-19 state of emergency is lifted or expires.
- **Protecting Customers** Lobbying Costs. Protects utility customers from unknowingly paying for lobbying activity.
- **Electricity Plan for Essential Medical Needs.** Identifies the specific medical equipment that qualifies for essential electricity and additional utility outreach

during outages.

- **Utility Reimbursement.** Provides consumers with a bill discount when a contracted service provider fails to provide service.
- **Utility Consumer Advocacy in the Public Service Commission.** Requires at least one PSC commissioner to have experience in advocating in the interests of utility consumers.
- **Emergency Response Plan Requirement.** Establishes the criteria for the Long Island Power Authority and its service provider's emergency response plans, and subjects them to review, approval and enforcement by the PSC.
- **Stronger Utility Storm Response.** Removes restrictions on the PSC's ability to penalize utility company violations and enhances oversight of utilities to ensure improved storm planning and response.
- **Professional Engineer Approval Requirement.** Requires a professional engineer to review and approve a gas infrastructure project to prevent public utility accidents from occurring in New York.
- **Public Statements of Compensation.** Requires large utility companies to publicly report the annual pay of their top employees.
- **Reimbursement for Lost Food or Medicine.** Provides a customer reimbursement for lost food or medicines due to an extended power outage.

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Obituaries

Pow Wow Organizer Gil 'Crying Hawk' Tarbox Dies at 73

Gil "Crying Hawk" Tarbox, a driving force behind the popular Daniel Nimham Pow Wow in Putnam County which celebrated the Wappinger tribe that lived in the area, passed away recently. He was 73.

Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell said that Tarbox, a Kent resident, "put Putnam County on the map" with the annual Pow Wow and helped residents learn about the county's history.

"We will all miss Gil. There is no replacing his enthusiasm, his spirit and his vast knowledge of the Native Americans who called our county home," Odell said. "The Pow Wow he helped create has grown into one of the biggest local events of the summer. It not only draws people from all over the country, it brings the past alive and gives the next generation a greater understanding of history."

A member of the Nimham Mountain Singers, Tarbox helped establish the Intertribal Pow Wow that is held one weekend every August at the Putnam County Veterans Memorial Park. With singing, dancing, drumming and storytelling, the Pow Wow helps educate young people about the 8,000 Wappinger Indians who lived in this area and their last chief, Daniel



Gil Tarbox with Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell.

Nimham.

Tarbox was also a Vietnam veteran. Art Hanley, deputy director of the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency, said he enlisted in the United States Army on Oct. 29, 1965, and trained as a construction

machine operator at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. He served his country for three years, including nearly two years overseas, on tours of duty in Germany and Vietnam, he said.

"I will always be grateful to Gil not only for his valuable contributions to Putnam County, but also for his honorable service to his country," said Putnam County Legislator Toni Addonizio (R-Kent).

Tarbox was active with veterans causes. He was a member of the Putnam County Veterans Memorial Park Advisory Board, which he served for many years. He was instrumental in expanding and refurbishing the Nimham Memorial at the county park's entrance, said Christopher Ruthven, deputy commissioner of Putnam County Parks.

"Every year he personally decorated the

memorial for Memorial Day and Veterans Day," Ruthven said. "And, of course, his group, the Nimham Mountain Singers, performed at many functions throughout the county including the Pow Wow and the 4-H fair."

His fundraising efforts at the Pow Wow went to support several veterans' organizations, including Honor Our Military Heroes Fund (HOMH), Semper Fi Odyssey, Tower of Hope Foundation, Wounded Warriors, the Service Dog Project and Final Salute.

"Gil gave so much of himself to the county. We are grateful for his service," Odell said. "My thoughts and prayers go out to his wife, Penny, his family and friends. May he rest in peace."

George Vargulick

George Vargulick, a retired elementary school teacher, died peacefully on Feb. 17 at home with his family by his side. He was 93.

Vargulick was born Dec. 25, 1927, in Fort Pierce, Fla. In the Army in 1945, he served overseas in the Pacific theater as a surgical technician. Later, he graduated from Iona College with a teaching degree and went on to have a fulfilling career as a teacher at Van Cortlandt Elementary School, where he taught for 29 years. He was also assistant scout master for Boy Scout Troop 45. For many years he was an active member of the Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Peekskill, as well as the Van Cortlandtville Historical Society and the Peekskill Volunteer Ambulance Corps.



George Vargulick

He was a gregarious, caring and active person, and with his wife, Helen, especially enjoyed square dancing with Tarry Squares, round dancing and clogging with the Tusker Trumbers. By nature, he was also quite the collector of stamps, and also rocks and minerals. Always curious about people, he was aware of the interests others had and liked to pass on newspaper and magazine articles he thought might be of interest to them. He was good company, shared his dry humor generously and was ready with a crisp short joke for every occasion.

He is survived by his beloved wife, Helen, with whom he shared 66 years of marriage and friendship, and their three children, George M., Julie Sanca and Debbie Lind.

A private viewing and graveside service was held on Feb. 24.

Kenneth Carr

Kenneth Robert Carr, 73, of North Palm Beach, Fla. and New Milford, Conn., embarked on to his next adventure quietly, courageously and peacefully on Feb. 11 at his home in Florida surrounded by family, just as he wished.

Over the past four-and-a-half years, Ken bravely battled pancreatic cancer with unfathomable strength and grace, guided by his personal mantra, "hold fast."

Ken Carr was a gentle and generous man of many interests and talents. Family, friendships and his work were his greatest of loves.

Living on Candlewood Lake in New Milford with his wife Aura Carr fed Ken's spirit. He delighted in the beautiful colors of the seasons and enjoyed sighting bald eagles soar above the water and stately blue herons gingerly cross his lawn. These were some of his simple pleasures.

Ken's second favorite place was The Club at River Oaks in Sherman, Conn. where he enjoyed playing golf with his buddies. There he was the unofficial club "Mayor," with his own reserved bar seat. In his personal and professional life, Ken showed his love and caring by simply asking, "What's doing?" He listened closely with attention and curiosity. If he thought he could add a solution to someone's problem, he offered his "two cents."

In 1981, Ken founded his company, Highway Rehab. Corp. located in Patterson, N.Y. and Buffalo. For 40 years he recycled



Kenneth Carr

roads throughout the northeastern United States. Ken's employees and business associates all held a special place in his heart. In 2020, Ken passed ownership to two of his dedicated employees.

Ken's knowledge of many subjects was astounding, especially world history and current events. He spent hours soaking in the news and could frequently be found on the phone with his brother Jay predicting the state of the union.

Ken also enjoyed a wide range of music. Charles Aznavour, Andrea Bocelli, Pink and Queen were among the artists who brought him joy (especially in the shower where he blasted their music loudly).

On a few special occasions, he could be found serenading his wife, Aura, to Jeffrey Osborne's "On the Wings of Love."

While he will be dearly missed, Ken Carr left those he cared for with a legacy of loving kindness.

The family extends their gratitude to the skilled doctors, nurses and aides who supported them and cared for Ken. They helped Ken live fully while he was in the process of dying.

Born in Bronxville on July 26, 1947, he was raised in White Plains by his parents, Muriel Grindrod Carr and Harry Carr. Ken was a Syracuse University graduate.

Most immediately, Ken is survived by his devoted wife of 34 years, Aura Donaldson Carr; his two loving daughters, Kristin Carr and Leslie Carr; his dear brother, Jay Carr; and his loyal and uplifting canine companions, Ella and Jack.

Danielle M. Coletta

Danielle Marie Coletta, a sixth-grade English teacher at Mildred E. Strang Middle School in Yorktown, died unexpectedly on Feb. 22 with her family holding her hands. She was 48.

Coletta was born Jan. 11, 1973. She attended George Washington Elementary School in Mohegan Lake, Copper Beech Middle School and Walter Panas High School in Cortlandt. She graduated from Pace University in Pleasantville with a bachelor's degree in education and Western Connecticut University where she received a master's degree in education.

She will be remembered for her devotion to the teaching profession. Her career began at Columbus Elementary School in Hawthorne, teaching second grade, followed by many years at Brookside Elementary School in Yorktown as a third-grade teacher. She was a lover of animals and spent many years of service volunteering for H.E.A.R.T., PACT

and Guiding Eyes for the Blind. She loved horseback riding, and while attending Pace University, was a member of the equestrian team.

Coletta excelled in her knowledge of computers and was considered by her family to be their resident "geek." While at Brookside, she was one of the first teachers to make use of the SMART Board in her room and then began mentoring her colleagues on ways to make special use of it. She was always taking classes to broaden her knowledge of various technologies and then incorporating them into her classroom. She was a loving, caring, giving and friendly individual. She will be missed by all.

Coletta is survived by her parents, Susann and Joseph Coletta; her brother, John, his wife, Jill and their children Aidan, Ethan and Jack Coletta; her three sisters, Kristin, her husband, Charles and their children Janna, Kailee and Madison Di Vico, Lianne and husband Edward Navedo and Jaclyn, her husband, Dustin and children Cameron and Carter Lucas; and by many loving cousins and friends.

No. Castle Ready to Bond for Accelerated Road Repaving Program

By Martin Wilbur

North Castle officials are planning to accelerate the final 24 miles of paving of town roads by drawing on most of a \$10 million bond authorization that was approved last spring.

Town Administrator Kevin Hay last week recommended to the Town Board that it borrow \$9 million to repave the remaining roads that have not been done since the town began the accelerated program about seven or eight years ago.

The paving would cost an estimated \$7.5 million to \$8 million with the likelihood of some drainage improvements and crack sealing needed in certain locations that would account for the balance of the expenditure, Hay said.

After consulting with Highway Foreman Jamie Norris, Hay explained that the work would take two or three years depending on the contractor and would also include drainage work where necessary. The paving should help to maintain the roadways' infrastructure during the time frame, he said.

"We feel at this point, with our financial numbers and our revenue numbers looking pretty good, COVID not significantly affecting as we were concerned of when we first authorized this, we recommend moving forward with accelerating the paving program through bonding," Hay told the board last week.

The \$9 million in borrowing would result in annual payments of \$700,429 over a 15-

year period, he said. Over those years, the town would likely use money from its annual \$950,000 road paving expenditure line in the operating budget to repay the bond. The remainder of the yearly road-paving funds would go toward ongoing maintenance, Hay said, although up to about \$300,000 could be needed.

Last May, the board authorized borrowing up to \$10 million but has held off taking the money to evaluate its revenues and overall fiscal situation in light of the upheaval caused by the pandemic.

With interest rates continuing to hover at or near record-low levels, it is the right time to finance key improvements, said town Director of Finance Abbas Sura. The annual payments are based on a 2 percent interest rate, which is a conservative estimate, he said.

"This is a good time to borrow money and get any capital improvements done," Sura said. "So, I feel like it's a good decision for us to go ahead with this."

If the town borrowed the money and is still paying principal and debt 15 years from now, Supervisor Michael Schiliro asked how the town would fund any future repaving on roads that have already been completed in the early stages of the accelerated program. Since the start of its aggressive paving schedule, the town has repaved close to 70 miles.

Hay responded that the town could dedicate a portion of any surplus each year toward the paving line. However, with North Castle having done drainage work where needed

while completing the paving, there should be less maintenance and fewer problems.

"The roads are lasting longer because we did drainage and we're already paying attention to the crack sealing and maintenance," Schiliro said. "We should get more years out of some roads."

Board members were agreeable to moving forward with the program.

"I think it's a great project, I think it's a great idea," said Councilman Barry Reiter. "I've always said that (with) quality of life, roads are key."

Councilwoman Barbara DiGiacinto said when discussing various municipal issues

with the Association of Towns recently, the issue of low borrowing rates was repeatedly raised by local officials from around the state. The general advice was to go ahead with projects if feasible.

"It was make a list of your capital improvements you've been putting off and do it because the bond rates are so favorable," DiGiacinto said. "So, obviously, I support this idea and we've already acted on it."

Prior to the town's aggressive repaving, its Pavement Condition Index averaged in the low to mid 60s. Today it's above 80, which is considered excellent for the Northeast, Schiliro said.

Quite an Honor

Walter Panas High School valedictorian Vaishali Miriyagalla has been named a finalist in the National Merit Scholarship Program. Miriyagalla received her Certificate of Merit last month. She is among the more than 15,000 of the 16,000 semifinalists to have met all requirements to advance to the final round. Finalists are competing for some 7,600 National Merit scholarships worth more than \$30 million.



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Letters to the Editor

Lakeland Has Worked Hard to Return to In-Person Learning Next Month

As district superintendent, I believe the best place for students to learn is in our classrooms. It is important for their academic success as well as their social and emotional growth. I wholeheartedly share the goal of wanting to bring our students back to school as much as possible, but we must do it safely.

I'm writing with some hopeful news as we work toward increasing in-person learning to the greatest extent possible while keeping our schools safe for students and staff by employing best practices to mitigate the coronavirus.

I will present the Board of Education with a series of considerations for increasing in-person learning for all of our students. These considerations, developed with our district physician, call for giving students the choice to attend school in-person four days a week, with Wednesdays continuing as our flex day. Students would still have the choice to learn fully remote at home as well.

For the four-day-a-week, in-person option to be possible, the district seeks to meet two metrics. Using the seven-day

rolling average for Westchester County, the coronavirus positivity rate must remain below 5 percent, and the district is targeting 70 percent or more of its faculty and staff to be fully vaccinated. Our goal to begin the four-day-a-week, in-person option is Apr. 6.

When our district physician, Dr. Louis Corsaro, certifies that the metrics have been met, all students could attend school four days a week. The district will reconfigure classrooms to provide three feet of space between desks and each desk will have a three-sided plastic barrier, a protocol permitted by the New York State Department of Health. In addition, every pre-K-12 classroom will have an air purifier.

Next week, the district will begin its on-site COVID-19 testing program, which is voluntary for students and staff and will help keep our schools safe as more students attend.

The logistics of bringing students in more frequently are complex and present challenges that will require flexibility from our families, students, faculty and staff.

If COVID-19 conditions change and the district is no longer meeting the metrics, there may be a need to return to the hybrid model.

I am looking forward to presenting this positive development in our planning with the Board of Education and the community.

There is nothing I would like more than for a complete return to normalcy and for our schools to fully reopen to in-person learning. As we continue to contend with the pandemic, this path forward represents our best option under the current conditions. I am hopeful that we will see students four days a week at our schools after spring recess. In the meantime, I ask for the community's patience and support in continuing to stay safe as we fight the virus together.

Be well and stay safe.

Brendan Lyons, Ed. D
Superintendent, Lakeland Central
School District

Letter Writer Made it Difficult to Determine if MTA Projects Are Needed

In response to Larry Penner's letter to the editor last week ("Something isn't Adding Up With the MTA's Cost for Two Key Projects"), the author knows transit. Not everyone else does. It would be nice if the author kept this in mind when he writes his opinion pieces.

The author discusses a proposed MTA project to work on the Park Avenue viaduct. He mentions work done on the viaduct from 1995 to 1998. The author asks, "What was the anticipated useful life? Did Metro-North adequately fund and follow the

maintenance plan for this asset so it would reach its useful life? Does this new project duplicate previous work?"

It would be nice if the author provided even a rudimentary set of details. I am not a civil engineer or a transit expert, but common sense has me asking several questions. What is the normal useful life for a project such as this? Pre-COVID this viaduct was extremely busy with Metro-North traffic every day. What effect does 22 years of having trains rumble over the viaduct about 20 hours a day have on the

viaduct and its structural integrity? What type of maintenance is required? What type of maintenance is helpful but not required? Did the MTA provide any of this maintenance?

When and if the author chooses to provide details is when I can conclude how necessary this project is.

Nat Weiner
Bronx, N.Y.

Proposed Accessory Apartment Bill is Overreach From Albany at its Worst

Re: Senate Bill S4547, Regulation of Accessory Dwelling Units.

In my opinion, this proposed piece of legislation is just another example of big government's reprehensible overreach to further micromanage even more aspects of our lives. Each individual locality in our

state has its own unique characteristics, which are currently and properly addressed by our local elected representatives. We do not need or desire interference by politicians, who do not represent North Castle residents, who attempt to impose their own political agendas on our town.

This legislation would result in egregious ramifications on our quality of life, and would significantly reduce the value of our homes and property.

Edward G. Lobermann
North White Plains

Uncontested Elections Are a Danger to Our Democracy

I have lived in Yorktown for over 30 years and have witnessed and been part of many local elections. Too often I have observed uncontested elections. It is the responsibility of party officials and their district leaders to insure there are prospective candidates for all offices. The people should decide who our officeholders are, not a handful of party leaders and backroom influencers.

This requires commitment by party officials and leadership. A concerted and pre-planned effort should be made to

identify qualified candidates – capable of both visionary and strategic thinking who have proven operational experience. As election season approaches, grooming, preparing, testing and encouraging candidates should be a sustained focus.

Uncontested elections are a danger to our town and society. They project the appearance of impropriety, discourage voting, result in disengaged constituents due to lack of choice and too often, poor governance results.

I urge the leaders and committee

members of our major parties to seek qualified candidates for this coming election and all future elections. You are responsible for and obligated to seek candidates for all open positions to ensure that a fair, open, honest and democratic election be held for town supervisor, town justice and highway superintendent.

Bob Giordano
Yorktown Heights

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Guest Column

For Schools Struggling to Offer In-Person Classes, the Answer Lies Outdoors

By Michael Peppard

"Can we please have class outside today?"

Remember that timeless question? Students gazed out the window, longing for fresh air and bodily movement.

But kids knew the answer before they even asked. No, we have to use the board. We need too many materials. Looks like rain.

But once the ground thaws this year, we should respond with an emphatic Yes. School should be outside, five days a week, for as many classes as we can, for as long as we can. Instead of worrying about how to get kids back in school, let's bring school outside to the kids.

Do it for public health. Do it for the economy. But most of all, do it for them.

The public health rationale for outdoor school is obvious. Evidence shows a vast difference in rate of transmission for the coronavirus when comparing indoor and outdoor environments. One Japanese study estimated the risk of transmission to be 18 times higher indoors. A large database of cases from China found a similar ratio.

And our county and local health officials have confirmed that transmission is happening primarily in private indoor gatherings. Add in the increased vaccination rates for teachers this month, and we can have five days per week of school starting in April.

The economic effects of the pandemic

have already been overwhelming. Previously flourishing industries that rely on social gathering have been reduced to rubble of debt. Crucial to any substantial economic recovery is the return of a full, predictable school week. We parents cannot plan our work around a partial school schedule, especially if we have multiple kids on different schedules. Let's also not forget that many teachers are themselves parents of school-age children and can't do their jobs well under current conditions.

The toll on mental health for parents and children is impossible to quantify. Thrust into a crisis, parents rose to the challenge of being full-time teachers, alongside our regular roles as employees or employers. We set up workspaces for our kids and ourselves in closets, garages, even bathrooms. We taught long division or Civil War history amid conference calls and emergency loan applications and infinite interruptions from children being children. But we could not convert our sprint into a marathon. Parents have reached a logistical and emotional breaking point.

Kids need a predictable return to school even more than parents do. Many have become sullen and detached, barely getting out of bed. Tweens and teens need their friend groups for healthy psychological development. Younger children need socialization and play with peers to learn basic life skills. Some of the youngest ones

literally can't remember their lives from before they wore masks.

Kids' emergency room visits related to mental health are up 25 to 30 percent compared to before the pandemic.

Teachers and administrators know all this, which is why they are working so hard to reopen more days per week. But the simplest solution for reopening school seems not to be getting enough consideration: don't focus just on the school building, but the property around the building.

Instead of spending on plexiglass dividers and cleaning supplies, communities could be buying tents for rain and shade. Instead of figuring out how to space desks six feet apart, schools could be buying clipboards and small whiteboards in bulk. Teachers who rely on technology to teach lessons can harness the power of the devices that students often carry with them; and for schools that have gone to one-to-one technology, this plan becomes even easier.

Better yet, drop the tech altogether and start the kids' necessary detox. Picture circles of students with whiteboards, clipboards, books and tactile learning aids. The morning could be dedicated to languages, math and social studies. Afternoon could be more active, with math and science experiments, music or drama. Programs such as Out Teach and Timbernook have hundreds of ideas at the ready.

What about weather? Outdoor school

in April will require pavilion tents and flexibility, but no more flexibility than we've already been managing. May, June, September and October are the best months of the year for weather. And the tents are a bargain compared to the collective cost of sitters, lost wages and economic depression. What parent would not donate the equivalent of one day's payment to a sitter instead toward a pavilion tent fund that would allow 50 more days of in-person school? Towns and villages can re-use their school tents for summer day camps, too.

To be sure, there would be challenges of logistics and pedagogy. But consider those it would eliminate: sanitizing every classroom every day, kids moving through hallways while maintaining social distance, glitchy internet, endless screen time. A few essential indoor spaces could be retained, such as science labs and special education clusters.

Even if only partially possible, the outdoors should be a foundation of any reopening plan. Working together, our communities can do this. Our kids need us to.

"So can we pretty please have class outside today?" The timeless question has never been more timely. This time, the kids are right.

Michael Peppard is a professor at Fordham University, a former high school teacher and a candidate running unopposed for village trustee in Pleasantville later this month.

Looking Forward to This Year's Campaign and Engaging With Voters

With the November presidential election still in our rear-view mirrors, it is difficult to believe that the 2021 campaign process is already well underway.

Local political parties have met, interviewed and selected their candidates. Petitioning, the process whereby candidates must collect signatures to be on the ballot, begins Mar. 2 and ends Mar. 22. Hence, it is already time that voters become engaged, learning about the candidates and issues. As Yogi Berra famously stated: "It is getting late, early."

Therefore, I am writing to inform the greater Cortlandt community, including its important component villages of Croton-on-Hudson and Buchanan, of my candidacy for town supervisor. It is indeed an honor to have been selected by unanimous consent to head our Cortlandt team of Democratic candidates for local office. We have decided to run as a slate, sharing the same platform, with the singular purpose of moving Cortlandt Forward.

Our slate will consist of James Creighton (running to retain his Town Board seat); Cristin Jacoby, also for Town Board (a full-time working mother of two who serves on the Zoning Board of Appeals); Laroue

Shatzkin (for a second term as town clerk); Debbie Carter (a Town Board member running for Receiver of Taxes); and Kimberly Ragazzo (seeking a second term as town judge). In addition to being the endorsed candidates for the Democratic Party, we are also honored to have the endorsement of the Working Families Party.

My background can be summarized as follows: Although born and raised in Manhattan, I have lived my entire adult life in Westchester. I have practiced as a cardiologist, first at Hudson Valley Hospital, where I was honored to serve as president of the medical staff and as chairman of the Medical Board. Becoming more involved in administration, I established both the inpatient medical service (Hospitalist Group) as well as the outpatient Westchester Medical Practice.

In 2014, I was recruited to Phelps Memorial Hospital, where I served as vice president of physician services and established Phelps Medical Associates, an outpatient office-based medical group with 15 locations, from Dobbs Ferry to Croton-on-Hudson. With over 100 physicians and providers, and hundreds more professional

staff, I was able to hone my management skills and style. Throughout all these endeavors, I have continued to practice cardiology, now in the multispecialty office I established in Croton-on-Hudson, adjacent to ShopRite.

I have always been an active participant in our Cortlandt community. As president of my local homeowners group, I was instrumental in preserving a large parcel for open space. Subsequently, I served on the town's Zoning Board of Appeals. In 2007, I was elected to my current position of councilman. Recently, Supervisor Linda Puglisi appointed me to serve as her deputy supervisor, enabling me to prepare for the role of town supervisor.

On a personal note, I met my wife, Terry, the summer before college. We have two wonderful adult children who were raised here in Cortlandt and attended Hendrick Hudson schools.

We cherish this community, feeling blessed to live our lives here, and to have the ability to pay forward these blessings.

You will be hearing from my Cortlandt colleagues in the coming weeks, and I look forward to engaging with many of you during this campaign.



By Dr. Richard H. Becker

Dr. Richard H. Becker is deputy supervisor in the Town of Cortlandt and a candidate for town supervisor.

SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

Developer, ArtsWestchester Partner on White Plains Sculpture

One of Westchester's most prominent business addresses, 50 Main St. in White Plains, will soon be home to a monumental sculpture to be installed under the arches of the 15-story office tower owned and managed by Ginsburg Development Companies.

Titled "Fragments of Something Bigger," the sculpture will measure 17.7 feet in height and be made of polished stainless steel, which was selected for its ability to reflect light. The sculpture, which is currently being fabricated, will be set on a pedestal and surrounded by seating, also made from polished stainless steel. Installation is scheduled for this spring.

The sculpture is the work of Bulgarian sculptor Georgi Minchev, who was selected through a competitive, international, open call process managed by ArtsWestchester. Artists were invited to submit proposals for the site.

Ginsburg Development and ArtsWestchester received submissions from 36 highly qualified sculptors. Three artists were designated as finalists and awarded an honorarium. Each finalist produced a scaled model of their proposal. In addition to Minchev, the other two finalists were David Provan of Cold Spring and Piero Manrique of Mamaroneck.

"We are delighted to partner with ArtsWestchester in bringing exciting public artwork to our development in downtown White Plains," said Ginsburg Development Principal Martin Ginsburg. "This remarkable sculpture is yet another example



An artist's rendering of the sculpture to be installed at 50 Main St.

of our ongoing commitment to showcasing world-class artwork at our commercial and residential developments."

Last year, Ginsburg Development and ArtsWestchester unveiled the work of nine artists from the greater Westchester area as part of the company's investment in its art collection for 50 Main St. The unveiling was

part of a grand opening of the first phase of Ginsburg's reinvention of its office building, which includes a new mezzanine amenity level.

A key feature of the new common space is a contemporary art collection curated by ArtsWestchester that features numerous Hudson Valley artists.

"ArtsWestchester applauds Martin Ginsburg for his appreciation of the important role that public art plays in creating vibrant environments that energize and inspire the places where we live and work," said ArtsWestchester CEO Janet Langsam. "Our vision for White Plains is an exciting urban center where significant works of contemporary art punctuate the landscape and the built environment."

Located at the gateway to downtown White Plains, 50 Main St. is a key component of Ginsburg Development's transformation of the former Westchester Financial Center into City Square, a new mixed-use center.

In addition to the modernization of 50 Main St., the project includes the transformation of the 1 Martine Ave. office building into 188 luxury rental apartments, new restaurant and retail space along Main Street and the creation of City Square Park, a private open space on the roof deck of the parking garage that connects all buildings and features fountains, waterfalls, walking paths, a putting green and outdoor dining on beautifully landscaped one-acre space. The focus on artwork will be carried throughout the entire project.

Ginsburg Development is nearing completion of the newly-renovated and redesigned lobby, which will feature the same level of high-end finishes and artwork as the amenity mezzanine.

City Square Park has been completed and the luxury apartments at 1 Martine will be opening this spring.

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New Bike Jumping Trails to Open This Spring at Graham Hills Park

By Martin Wilbur

Local mountain biking enthusiasts will have three new trails to choose from this spring at Graham Hills Park in Mount Pleasant to test their riding and jumping skills.

Westchester County, which owns the park, announced last Wednesday that materials are being shipped to construct the trails near the lot on Route 117 across the street from Pace University. County officials worked with a committee of local riders and biking advocates to develop a course after an unauthorized set of jumps was discovered last spring in a forested area about a five-minute walk through the woods from the Saw Mill Parkway intersection with Marble Avenue.

"The mountain bike community at Graham Hills is passionate about their sport," said County Executive George Latimer. "When we learned they were interested in developing the skills area, we were happy to work with them to develop their ideas and move the project forward."

The county Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation identified the location for the new trails next to the existing trail and parking lot entrance. Personnel

from county parks worked with Jim Dellavalle Designs and the Graham Hills Skills Park Committee to design the trails using proper techniques.

Bob Dillon, a local biker and coach of the Pleasantville mountain bike team that competes in the National Interscholastic Cycling Association, said the collaboration between the county and the committee generated buy-in from the bikers.

"I haven't heard any reservations from the cycling community that participated in the build of the other area," Dillon said. "I've heard nothing but good things. Everyone just feels very positive that this is going to be as good or better and it's in a safer location."

The illicitly-constructed course discovered last year was built in an environmentally sensitive area of the park and presented a danger to riders. In a report to the county last summer, Dellavalle stated that the trails crisscrossed and riders traveled at fast speeds. Lack of signage, which didn't inform riders of the difficulty of the course, and encroachment into a wetland preservation area that is prone to runoff, posed additional problems, he said.

It is expected that the unauthorized trails will be dismantled.



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTOS

A portion of the roughly-constructed bike jumping trail discovered last spring at Graham Hills Park in Mount Pleasant. Westchester County, which owns the park, just announced a new professionally designed course is being built and will open in the spring. Left: A sign at Graham Hills Park in the vicinity of where the new mountain biking trails and jumps will be located.

Dillon said because the new trails will be professionally designed it should have greater longevity and require less maintenance.

Since the previous trail was used by many youngsters, Dillon also mentioned that crossing the Saw Mill Parkway posed a danger. The Route 117 parking lot will make the trails much more accessible, he said.

"We are so grateful to the county for giving a green light to this project, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Graham Hills Skill Park Committee member Jaymeson Leo said. "Moving forward it will be a valuable addition to the park and

community."

The project is funded primarily by donations of materials and work completed by volunteers, said Peter Tartaglia, the first deputy commissioner at Westchester County Parks. Consultant costs is between \$5,000 and \$8,000, he said.

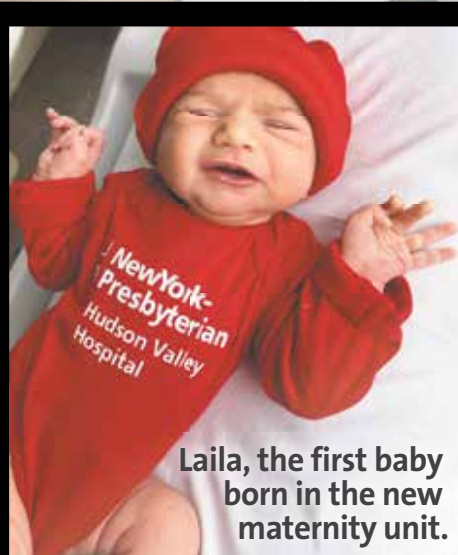
County Legislator Margaret Cunzio (C-Mount Pleasant) said since last spring there had numerous meetings and calls among county officials and the committee to make sure the project a reality.

"There was give and take on every side but I'm very, very happy that we were able to come to an

agreement, and not only come to an agreement, but clearly things are progressing and moving forward and we want to make sure we get this done," Cunzio said.

Volunteers from the Westchester Parks Foundation have placed much of the construction material at the new location. The material was donated by Thalle Industries, R. Pugni and Sons, Ad Tec and Mandy Santucci.

Construction will resume when the snow melts and the ground is firmer. The new trails are on track to open sometime this spring.



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The illustration above is an artist's depiction of the Indian Point property after the completion of major decommissioning work.

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CONTINUUM 57

WESTCHESTER
MAGAZINE

Officials Send Message on Importance of Vaccination at Pop-Up Site

By Martin Wilbur

Getting the public vaccinated against COVID-19 has been a struggle for public officials and the millions of Americans who want to protect themselves against a virus that has killed more than 500,000 people in the United States.

Last Saturday, Northern Westchester Hospital and the Village of Mount Kisco made it a lot easier for 200 local residents to receive their first dose.

The two entities, along with Neighbors Link and Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office, partnered to operate a pop-up vaccination site at the Fox Senior Center. The precious first doses were reserved for the community's underserved and hard to reach populations who are currently eligible to receive the vaccine, including many seniors who don't have the ability to travel far, have limited resources or are from the village's sizeable immigrant population.

"Here in Mount Kisco, unlike a lot of surrounding communities, we have a good amount of subsidized housing, so these are truly folks that are traditionally underserved," said the village's Mayor Gina Picinich. "So it's essential that we get to these folks. They couldn't get to the

County Center. They don't have a computer to make an appointment. So this is tremendous."

Picinich said she had learned of a pop-up vaccination site in Port Chester a few weeks earlier and called the governor's office to inquire about holding a similar event in Mount Kisco. At about the same time, she was told that Carola Bracco, the executive director of Neighbors Link, the organization that does outreach with the region's immigrant community, was looking to do the same.

Aside from administering the first dose to 200 local residents, Bracco said the event was important to convince people that the vaccine is safe. She urged anyone whose turn comes up and has the opportunity to receive the vaccine should get it.

"The vaccine is safe, it doesn't give you COVID, it doesn't have a chip in it and that it is safe for people to get," Bracco said. "We think it's the best way to protect people from getting extremely sick from COVID."

To help drive that message home, New York's Secretary of State, Rossana Rosado, a White Plains resident, received her first dose last Saturday at the pop-up site. Her message was similar: If you have the chance to get the vaccine don't

hesitate.

After waiting the mandatory 15 to 20 minutes following the vaccine and with no ill effects, she explained why it was important for her to take it publicly.

"I'm a private person and a chicken but I've come out of my comfort zone because I think it's important to set the example for folks," Rosado said.

"I think getting the vaccine in a very public way is a way to walk the walk and say I would never ask you to do something I'm not doing," she added.

A member of the state's Vaccine Equity Task Force, Rosado said there are many factors why many people are afraid of taking the shot. However, reaching the minimum 70 percent vaccination that public health officials say is necessary for herd immunity is critical in order to put the pandemic behind us.

Bracco mentioned that as many as 40 percent of health care workers are also hesitant to sign up, so it will take plenty of work to convince enough of the population to get the vaccine.

Saturday's vaccination event was the latest effort by Northern Westchester Hospital and Northwell Health to reach underserved members of the public throughout



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

Seniors wait their turn last Saturday to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at the Fox Senior Center.

the New York metropolitan area, said Derek Anderson, the hospital's executive director. Northwell operated 20 different mission-based locations throughout Long Island, New York City and Westchester last Saturday.

Northern Westchester has been servicing as a community vaccination POD the past two months, and when there's an extra dose, looks to equitably distribute to those in the eligible categories, he said.

"We've been able to get firefighters, homeless shelters participants, which really has been fantastic," he said.

Picinich said the faster the village can vaccinate its residents,

particularly the seniors, the faster Mount Kisco can reopen the senior center, which has been closed for nearly a year.

"Getting seniors vaccinated means that we get closer to opening this center and this is essential for mental health, physical well-being," Picinich said. "It goes beyond the disease."

Those who received their shot on Saturday will return on Mar. 20 for their second dose.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine and who is eligible, visit <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/covid-19-vaccine-tracker>.



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P'ville Looking to Expand In-Class Instruction This Spring

By Lindsay Emery

The Pleasantville School District is planning to expand in-person learning for grades K-6 after spring break two weeks after parents of primary grade-level students appealed to district officials that more time was needed in the classroom.

Superintendent Mary Fox-Alter emphasized that a reduced regional infection rate and desk shields will be imperative for the return of students to school.

"With the use of desk shields, we can certainly expand in-person instruction for grades K through six with a minimal adjustment below six feet," Fox-Alter said.

A timeline for the return of students in grades 7-12 will be more difficult to predict because of their increasingly individualized schedules and older buildings with smaller spaces.

The District Reopening Committee will be considering the introduction of desk shields and other barriers when six feet of social distancing cannot be maintained. Problems such as specific desk shields with Velcro for sled desks are being examined for the high school. Students carrying their own desk shield from class to class is also being weighed, along with other issues that must be resolved before the return to in-person learning.

School officials are also planning three town halls this month to inform the community about the increase of in-person learning. The tentative dates for the forums

are Mar. 11 for Bedford Road School and Mar. 16 for Pleasantville Middle School. The date for Pleasantville High School's town hall had yet to be determined last week but will be held before Mar. 26.

A recent survey that attracted 847 responses from community members, saw 668 parents intending to send their students to school for in-person instruction five days a week. Another 101 responded that they were uncertain about sending their children to school while 78 said they would not return their students at all. Most of the survey respondents are parents of students who attend the K-4 Bedford Road School. Parents will continue to have the option to continue full remote learning.

Superintendent Search

Last week, the Board of Education approved a contract with Dr. Michael Kuchar and Dr. Frank Auriemma from the search firm Strategic Educational Advantage to help conduct the district's superintendent search.

Kuchar explained the community will help develop a profile of a candidate that will ensure the best fit by creating a district survey for people to complete.

Focus groups comprised of parents, community members and school district groups will be asked the key question about the characteristics they would like to see in the next administrator to lead the district in order to create a candidate profile, he said. The profile will drive the consultants' screening process, as well as direct the board with their interview questions.

Kuchar and Auriemma aim to have the survey available by this week.

Fox-Alter announced in January that she will be retiring at the end of the calendar year.

The board also approved the retirement of beloved members of the school community, including Director of Athletics John Bauerlein. Bauerlein served the district in that capacity for 12 years.

"You know, when things gel, they go well, so I'm really happy and thank you guys for all the excitement and the moments that this community has provided for me," he said. "It's been a wonderful run."

In addition to his duties as athletic director, Bauerlein also assumed the role of COVID-19 coordinator for the district, which included monitoring in-person learning attendance and contact tracing. The board and Fox-Alter wished him the best and emphasized the impact that Bauerlein has left on Pleasantville.

"So, John, it's bittersweet but we congratulate you on your retirement and thank you for your service to our kids, to your coaches, to your parents and just for constantly cheering on our Panthers," Fox-Alter said.

A Brighter Day

Marla Beth Enowitz, artist and founder of Marla Beth Designs, recently donated 90 of her XO, Marla Beth love-themed canvases to staff and patients at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital for Valentine's Day. The hospital's Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy program helps children and their families understand and adjust to illness and hospitalization. Enowitz's designs, described as whimsical and sophisticated, are featured in some of the most beautiful homes and businesses throughout the region. A curated selection of mini-works from the limited series is available at www.marlabethdesigns.com.



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Making the Home Suitable for Quarantine

More than 15 years ago, I wrote a Home Guru article about the trend futurist Faith Popcorn (obviously a pseudonym) who coined the expression cocooning, or the trend of people preferring to stay more at home.

At the time, as a public relations practitioner, I was engaged in a project with her, but personally was very much doubting her projections, at least for myself. What, me? Stay at home? Never.

But today most of us, including me, are now doing exactly that, and it's not by choice; it's by demand of civic and health officials. The new term for cocooning is to be quarantined.

If you're like me, you hate the state of affairs of being restricted from going out, gallivanting if you will, going where you want whenever you want.

As a former frequent restaurant-goer, it is the dining out that I have missed most. But just the simpler pleasures of being able to walk out of my condo without having to remember to mask up is very much short-circuiting the normal way I live.

Popcorn's forecast was for a home-centered lifestyle to be supported with gadgets, furnishings and accessories to make one's abode a more welcoming entertainment and work hub. She even projected the advent of shopping at home through technology long before the concept



By Bill Primavera

was developed. In fact, the re-emergence of the lifestyles trend is aided and abetted by 21st century technology.

The trend today is very much in effect, necessitated and enforced by a nasty virus.

Most times a change in lifestyles is a slow evolution and sometimes it's a big switch. In this case today, it's a bigger switch than most of us have ever encountered before.

This lifestyles phenomenon is leading to the design of official home offices, not just spare bedrooms, and designated entertainment rooms, fashioned as theaters and game rooms. We in the real estate business

are certain to see more flat screen TVs in living rooms, hot tubs in garden rooms, more home gyms and more open kitchens where homemakers can interact with their quarantined families and cook at the same time.

New housing developments will give us more options to stay on our own block, as well as in our own homes. They are planned around the topography so that each can have a walk-out lower level that would suggest a large space there designated for at-home enjoyment for the family.

I'm friends with a couple who some time ago converted a raised ranch in Yorktown Heights into an enlarged colonial designed to entertain a big family.



With a punch-out addition in back that is 30 feet deep, they were able to combine their first level's original living room, dining room and kitchen into one open space for entertainment with an equally large kitchen/dining room in the new addition, ample enough to seat 25.

On the lower level is a party room that includes two large screen TVs, one at each end of the room "specifically designed for Super Bowl Sunday," they say, "where everyone in the large space can see the game." There's also a pool table, an octagonal gaming table, a darts table, two generous seating areas and a full-service bar. Why leave home to have fun? It makes good sense in a COVID-19 world.

In answer to any argument that quarantine and spending less outside the home will stall

the nation's economy, just consider all the new technology, accessories and furnishings we are utilizing to turn our homes into work and family entertainment hubs.

While writing this column on my new iMac laptop, I'm lounging in my pajamas in a comfortable easy chair in my living room, intermittently watching TCM on my large screen TV and, with any leftover brain space, enjoying my favorite recent film, "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood," on my iPad, while periodically checking for e-mails and voicemails on my iPhone. Case closed.

Bill Primavera, while a writer and public relations practitioner, is also a realtor associated with William Raveis Real Estate. To engage the talents and services of The Home Guru to market your home for sale, call 914-522-2076.

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Chorale Provides Creative Outlet, Instruction for Children Singers

By Lindsay Emery

The Putnam Chorale is forming the county's first youth chorus for children eight to 12 years old, beginning hour-long online instruction this Wednesday afternoon.

Musical Director Jessica Zamek is excited about the prospect of guiding children of that age now and once the pandemic ends.

"For middle schoolers and high schoolers, they have their musicals, they have select choirs, but for this age group, eight to 12, we wanted to offer something that isn't offered a lot for that age group – really consistent musical instruction and quality pieces and an opportunity to be with those students who are also interested in that," Zamek said.

The first practice will focus on meeting one another and finding out how much musical aptitude students have, such as whether they can match pitch. It is not an audition, Zamek said, but rather a gauge as to what needs to be taught. It is hoped that they attract children from throughout Putnam and northern Westchester.

During the first month of rehearsals, the students will practice vocalizing, warming up and beginning the process of learning how to have healthy vocal techniques. Zamek plans to introduce the children to a broad variety of pieces and a wide breadth of lyrics. She also wants to teach the students a piece in a foreign language as soon as they commence practices.

In addition to the weekly chorus gatherings, two voice lessons with Zamek are included in each semester's package. Zamek has been teaching voice lessons for about 20 years and completed her undergraduate degree in vocal performance and graduate degree in opera performance. She currently provides private voice lessons to children at Rye Country Day School and is familiar with online teaching.

"I definitely want to see my students in person, but there's a lot to be done and it's certainly better than the alternative, which is no music," Zamek said.

Although the first month of the Putnam Youth Chorus will be through Zoom, Zamek and Putnam Chorale President Nick Simonelli hope that students can meet in person by next month by following all Centers for Disease Control precautions including singing outside with masks and maintaining social distance. Simonelli believes that professionals should task themselves with teaching youngsters.

"Every discipline, every work, every craft, needs to train the next generation in whatever it is you're doing," he said. "I love choral singing and it's my objective to help promote kids singing in choruses and move from there so eventually the kids will even sing in the Putnam Chorale with the adults."

The arts have been among the field that have been severely impacted during the pandemic with artists losing their livelihood. But they have also been



Musical Director Jessica Zamek is leading a new youth chorus, which was recently formed by the Putnam Chorale. The first sessions will be held this week.

deprived of their creativity, Zamek said. She and Simonelli stressed that encouraging the youngsters' creativity is more important now than ever.

Socialization, even if it is in an online setting, is also crucial for children so that they can develop empathy, form friendships and even release endorphins.

"I think being involved in a creative community, it really is transformative, and I think that's one of the things that Nick was also very interested in, is that the adults and the children will be interacting together,

even if it's nonmusical at first," Zamek said. "So, I think that pairing is definitely going to be transformative."

What are Zamek and Simonelli looking forward to during the inception of the Putnam Youth Chorus?

"I just want to see the smiles on the kids' faces when they get to sing something for the first time," Simonelli said.

Even though the Putnam Youth Chorus is a tuition-based group, there are scholarships available for those who qualify.

The weekly rehearsals will begin this Wednesday from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. To register and learn more about the program, visit <https://www.putnamchorale.org/youth/>.

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Program Builds Social Skills, Stresses Physical Activity for Children

By Sophia Spiegel

The COVID-19 pandemic has been overwhelming for many children, perhaps even more so for those challenged socially.

Frances Hernandez's 13-year-old son struggles with self-esteem and anxiety. However, after enrolling in Build 4 Life's new Social Skills Program, she has seen tremendous growth in his physical and mental well-being.

"This program has made him believe in himself and showed him he can do things he didn't think he could do, or want to do, because he was uncomfortable," Hernandez said.

Build 4 Life's innovative program is Westchester's first children's social skills classes that combines physical activity, social interaction and peer counseling to combat problems children are facing, some of which have intensified during the past year.

Two classes are currently being offered: Introduction to the Building Blocks of Socialization, for ages 4-7, and Building Blocks to Utilize Effective Communication for children 8 to 13 years old. The program also includes one-on-one sessions, centered around each child's interests, for students who could benefit from individualized attention.

Alex-Jamal Burton, CEO and founder of Build 4 Life, a health and wellness company dedicated to helping children and adults reach their full potential, has observed a change in many children's behavior since the onset of the pandemic.



Build 4 Life CEO and founder Alex-Jamal Burton works with a couple of children as part of a program he developed that improves social skills for kids. During the past year, the pandemic has caused some children's development to stall or regress.

"It is for any child, not just for kids with disabilities," Burton said of his program. "It is also for kids that are lacking confidence or lacking the ability to make friends, especially during COVID, since kids are in a tough situation where their prime optimal years of socialization are now being spent over computers where they are isolated from their friends."

He joined forces with Claudine Gebhard, a social skills counselor with more than 15 years of working with children with learning disabilities as a service coordinator and evaluator, and REP Athletics founder Geoff Rose to design one-hour, weekly in-person classes that are designed to a child's specific

needs. Classes are held at REP Athletics in Larchmont.

"There are so many social skills programs out there, but we wanted to come up with something a little more unique that is not a one-fit-for-all," Gebhard said.

The team meets with each student and their parents to create a game plan to guide each child toward reaching their goals. The program runs in four-week intervals. At the end of each cycle, progress reports and evaluations are provided to parents to keep them updated on their child's progress.

While the program is individualized for each child, the students also gather in group settings to form a team. Gebhard, Burton and Rose lead the classes, which are supplemented by peer mentors and specialists, including speech therapists and special education teachers when needed.

During classes, kids participate in activities that are designed to incorporate movement and teach appropriate social behaviors. Gebhard and Burton work to include simple social nuances, such as saying hello to someone when they enter the room and maintaining eye contact when speaking to others.

Burton and Gebhard have found that one of the biggest challenges for children is reading facial expressions and taking social cues from people wearing masks. They have been emphasizing the importance of speaking louder, especially for younger students whose voices are often softer. They work on raising the tone of their voices and using hand gestures to help overcome the



One of the many fun activities that are part of the Build 4 Life curriculum, which also emphasizes physical activity.

barriers of communicating with masks.

Burton said he has seen great strides.

"The sense of community is tremendous because the kids interact more with each other as opposed to in the beginning, when everybody was super shy and wanted to do their own thing," he said. "Now there is a sense of inclusivity and helping others."

The Build 4 Life social skills curriculum will support children even after the pandemic comes to an end.

"I think the pandemic is highlighting a lot of shortcomings, but these problems and issues will still be there, and there needs to be a foundation laid for prospering even when we come out of the pandemic," Burton said.

continued on next page

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WMCHHealth Launches Task Force for Equitable Vaccine Distribution

The Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMCHHealth) has established the Health Equity Task Force (HETF) to help ensure all residents of the Hudson Valley have access to information, education and resources to ensure robust vaccination as the state ramps up COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts.

Westchester Medical Center is serving as the coordinator for the Hudson Valley Region Hub of New York State's Regional Vaccine Network.

HEFT's goal is to ensure health equity is a priority woven into every facet

of COVID-19 vaccination effort (e.g., education, communication, dissemination, challenges, prevention efforts) and that short-term and long-term vaccination program development and implementation reflects an array of diverse community perspectives.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), health equity is achieved when every person has the opportunity to attain his or her full health potential and no one is disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially-

determined circumstances.

"HETF is comprised of community stakeholders and clinical champions representing communities throughout the Hudson Valley. It is an extension of WMCHHealth's mission to be of service to everyone in our region, and underscores our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as a healthcare provider and as an employer," said Michael D. Israel, president and CEO of WMCHHealth. "We are well-prepared to build on our strong, existing foundation of community engagement."

Ensuring Health Equity in Vaccine Distribution

WMCHHealth's HETF is comprised of 75 clinical experts and community stakeholders, including leaders of organizations serving diverse populations, faith-based institutions and social service agencies, along with representatives from the New York State.

Task force members meet weekly to identify vaccine access and distribution barriers and develop solutions to remove them, particularly impediments that affect underserved communities. HETF is sharing identified issues, along with solution recommendations, with New York State to refine vaccine distribution strategies. HETF's specific focus areas are available for review at COVIDInfo.WMCHHealth.org/Vaccination.

"COVID-19 has ravaged our most

vulnerable communities, communities that were already suffering from health disparities and other social inequities," said Mecca Mitchell, senior vice president, diversity, inclusion and community engagement for WMCHHealth, who is leading HETF.

"Now, these same communities face unique vaccination challenges that must be addressed in a way that is respectful, culturally intelligent, and trustworthy to ensure greater participation in the drive for vaccination."

Diverse Membership for Diverse Communities

"Neighbors Link is proud to be a part of the Health Equity Task Force," said Carola Bracco, executive director of Neighbors Link. "We have come to see the stark disparities in education, employment and health care as a result of COVID-19 and it is critical for vaccine distribution to be equitable, safe and fair, particularly for the communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic."

"Our next generation depends on us to pave the way for health and restoration," said Rev. Erwin L. Trollinger Jr. of the Calvary Baptist Church of White Plains. "The shot is necessary for the past, present and future generations. Let us walk away from the past fears and embrace this opportunity to be healed."

Program Builds Social Skills, Stresses Physical Activity for Children

continued from previous page

In the future, there are plans for new classes, such as a girls' group dedicated to promoting positive body image.

"We want them to be able to work on social skills but also how to face the world and problems that are coming up," Gebhard said. "We want to provide a place where they feel safe enough to talk about these issues."

Parent Rebecca Blank, who enrolled her son in the program, said with the year of isolation, Build 4 Life provides an outlet for physical activity for children while improving their communication skills.

"It's the one time each week that he

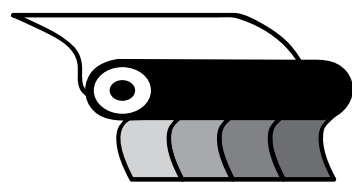
leaves feeling like he really accomplished a physical challenge," Blank said. "He has rosy cheeks and a great sense of achievement."

Health protocols are followed at REP Athletics with mandatory mask wearing and temperatures taken upon entry. Windows are kept open and equipment is sanitized after each use. A filtration system ensures the safety of students and staff.

There is a maximum of 10 children per class. Outdoor sessions are planned once the weather turns warmer.

For more information and to register for classes, visit <https://www.ibuild4life.com/book-online>.

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Boutique Offers Eclectic Mix of Garments, Accessories

By Kristen McNerney

It could take months or years for someone to fully realize what career path will bring their life the most fulfillment, and that sentiment applies to Cold Spring boutique owner Judiann Romanello.

Last year, Romanello opened DamnAged Vintage, a carefully curated vintage clothing shop, after nearly a decade working for high-profile fashion designers and trying to figure out her place in the world. But while fashion was simply an interest growing up, her path to becoming an educator opened the door to a world that would eventually become her passion.

While close to completing her dual master's program in elementary and special education at Manhattanville College, Romanello instead took an editorial position at Glam Damnit, a style blog that provided a segue into the fashion industry.

"I was always interested in fashion and just old things," Romanello said. "I didn't go to fashion school, so I didn't know what kind of jobs existed. I'm a firm believer in fake it 'till you make it because nobody knows what they're doing at first."

Following her editorial role, Romanello went to work as a temp for South America at Ralph Lauren, a job that required eight interviews, she said. But when her tenure ended, she was advised by the corporation to work a retail position if she wanted to further her pursuits in the corporate fashion

sector as a visual merchandiser.

Romanello reluctantly took a job at The Westchester managing a Club Monaco store before landing a position with Elie Tahari, an Israeli fashion designer, setting up showrooms. Two years later, Romanello secured a position with Cartier as a visual merchandiser.

"On my first day, I showed up to work with a roller suitcase and there was a credit card and plane ticket to Texas on my desk," she said, explaining how Cartier would send her to as many as three cities a week setting up jewelry counters and accessory walls. "The level of detail was exquisite."

However, she found the work to be creatively stifling, asserting that her hunger was in fashion. After a year at Cartier, she expressed interest in opening a vintage clothing store of her own and took a freelance position with the company while running a private business selling clothes out of her New York City apartment.

While Cartier would fly her to Texas, Romanello would shop at discount designer centers and pack as many outfits in a bag as possible before her flight home. Back in New York City, people would book appointments to browse the rack of clothes she had set up in her confined living space.

"I would give my customers macaroons and champagne and it would be a lot of fun," Romanello said. "I think I had three different people trying on clothes in my apartment at

one time."

Struggling to make ends meet, Romanello took a side job as a bartender, but on her last day of training, she was fired. Struck with defeat, she opted to leave New York City to live with her mother in Garrison to save money and focus her energy on opening her own shop.

Eventually, Romanello set her eyes on Cold Spring.

"I knew of Cold Spring as a kid," she said. "There were antiques, it was cute, it was quaint and it was in the middle of a mountain."

Romanello opened DamnAged Vintage last June. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused distress for many merchants, the lockdown benefited her business.

"I wouldn't have been able to take my time setting up had the opening not been delayed," she said.

Much of her business is conducted online through the business website, which launched during the shutdown.

The boutique is open Thursday through Monday for in-person shopping and provides customers with a nostalgic experience. Romanello said every article of clothing in the store is hand-picked, with a collection of apparel designed to appeal to all body types.

As the business grows, she hopes to cater to men's fashion.

Romanello added that each piece of clothing is given the proper restorative care, with a special cleansing ritual conducted for clothes that belonged to those who have



There's something for everyone at DamnAged Vintage, a Cold Spring boutique that carries a variety of hand-picked clothing.

passed on. She said the ceremony is meant to restore their positive energy and give everything in the store a light and airy feel.

Along with clothes, DamnAged Vintage also offers candles, incense kits and accessories.

"I'm a quirky person and we sell damn good vintage," Romanello said. "To me, that's thrilling."

DamnAged Vintage is located at 109 Main St. in Cold Spring. It's open Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The boutique is closed on Tuesday and Wednesday.

For more information, call 845-809-5600, visit www.damnagedvintage.com or e-mail judiann@damnagedvintage.com.

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The Evolving State of Winemaking – From Vineyard to Virtual Winery



By Nick Antonaccio

Still wallowing in the pandemic, I've resorted to reprising several columns. Herewith, one of my personal favorites.

Wine is, in its most elemental form, an agricultural product. To make a decent wine you must be a decent farmer. This axiom has been generally true since the beginning of winemaking, nearly 6,000 years ago. Of course, as with many products, there are exceptions, which is the focus of this week's column.

In the last 30 years, the winemaking industry has been turned upside down, through modern technology and techniques plus modern entrepreneurs. These influences have infiltrated every level of wine production.

Many wine consumers believe that the process for making wine is similar for all wines. The supposition is that grapes are gently handpicked at the epitome of ripeness, carefully sorted for rotting grapes, leaves and insects and then lovingly crushed, fermented, aged and bottled, all under the watchful eye of a master winemaker.

Although this process does occur in many

wineries, it is as far cry from the vast quantity of wines sold in the United States. For the most part, winemaking is big business. Over 80 percent of wines produced and sold in the United States come from about 2 percent of the number of producers.

This is the current state of winemaking in the United States. There are several modern-day business models being practiced, some subtly different from each other, others radically different from centuries-old winemaking.

1. Full-spectrum wineries. This is the traditional model still flourishing around the world – but in diminishing numbers. Entrepreneurs invest in farmland, then plant and tend grapevines and harvest the crop each year. They also invest capital in an all-encompassing winery operation, replete with pressing equipment, fermenting containers, storage and aging barrels or tanks and a bottling line. This operation typically requires a significant capital investment.

But what if you have the passion but not the cash? There are several means by which to pursue your ambition.

2. Buy the grapes but control the wine production. There are many farmers who find immense satisfaction in purchasing high-quality farmland and planting and growing their own grapevines. And there are no shortages of entrepreneurs who would



rather stain their hands with grape juice rather than sully them with vineyard soil.

By outsourcing grape production, these winemakers are able to focus on producing the final product rather than the raw material. And the capital commitment, along with the annual operating costs, can be far less than for a full spectrum winemaker.

3. The alchemists. These entrepreneurs are interested in producing their own individual expression of a wine, without the burdensome cost and time commitment of growing grapes or producing fermented grape juice. They will outsource grape production and then contract with a cooperative wine-processing facility to crush and ferment their purchased grapes. No sullied or stained hands, and a minimal capital investment. Their primary investment is in barrels and warehouse space. They blend purchased grape juice in their own barrels

and then store and age the wine, as they deem appropriate to achieve a desired end product. An outsourced mobile bottling and labeling line completes the cycle.

4. The hobbyists – or the cash-strapped. These entrepreneurs have created what I've dubbed the virtual winery. Every phase of the winemaking process is outsourced, typically to a vertically integrated processing plant. A virtual winery "owner" contracts with these firms to purchase certain grapes, process them and place the virtual winery's label on the bottle. No capital costs, a negotiated annual operating cost, clean hands and the ultimate gratification: your own wine to market. It is estimated there are over 1,500 virtual wineries in the United States alone.

The idyllic image many of us have as we sip a glass of wine is a small winery with rows of owned vineyards surrounding a red-barn winery building, guarded by a frolicking dog and ebullient owner. The truth in many instances is a carefully created marketing campaign of sensual images and illusory labels.

Nick Antonaccio is a 45-year Pleasantville resident. For over 25 years, he has conducted wine tastings and lectures. Nick is a member and program director of the Wine Media Guild of wine journalists. He also offers personalized wine tastings and wine travel services. Nick's credo: continuous experimenting results in instinctive behavior. You can reach him at nantonaccio@theexaminernews.com or on Twitter @sharingwine.

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New York’s New Power of Attorney Law: Shorter, Simpler – Hopefully

More than a decade ago, New York introduced an updated power of attorney form with two parts to replace the three- to four-page standard form that was used for many years.

The first section listed the chosen agents and the specific tasks (banking, real estate, taxes) to be handled. Part 2 was a statutory gift rider that controlled gifting and asset transfers for estate and long-term care planning. This longer form was supposed to reduce the risk of fraud and provide greater structure and clarity to all the people and financial institutions working with the power of attorney.

In a surprise to no one, the updated two-part power of attorney was overly complex and tricky to properly execute. Another development was more disturbing. The new form wasn’t honored by many financial institutions.

So what happened? Some financial institutions insisted on having their clients utilize the company’s form and did not accept the New York Statutory Power of Attorney form.

The problem was – and remains – that powers of attorney tend to be prepared for people with health issues. A power of attorney form’s creation is tied to the principal’s competency. For example,

an unrevoked, executed Power of Attorney From 2015 remains valid, and if the principal (the person creating the power of attorney) has lost competency, they may be unable to make a new one.

Banks compelling a disabled or incompetent client to make a new power of attorney with their company-specific form is a huge problem. Without an accepted power of attorney in place, basic banking functions may not take place and a guardianship proceeding may be necessary to obtain a court appointment.

Starting July 13, the new Power of Attorney law will try to re-introduce some common sense to the preparation, execution and acceptance of this very important form. The major development is the requirement of a time-sensitive, written document from any party refusing to honor the power of attorney with reasons listed for the refusal. Added to this is a damages provision for legal actions to compel acceptance of a power of attorney. The expectation is that banks will not routinely reject powers of attorney because it will be costly to do so.



By Alan D. Feller, Esq.

Also, under the new law existing powers of attorney would still be in effect, but new ones will have simpler execution rules. For principals who are unable to sign the form, they can more easily direct another person to sign on their behalf. This is a very helpful development for individuals who cannot physically sign the form due to illness or other circumstance. Furthermore, the document itself will be simpler. The two-part form will be replaced by a single, unified document.

Annual gifting amounts will be raised from the current \$500 limit to \$5,000. Financial matters related to health care will be covered more completely with the new form. A recordkeeping requirement for agents is also built into the law.

We will see how the new power of attorney form works in practice. Hopefully, simpler equals better.

Alan D. Feller, Esq. is managing partner of Sloan & Feller Attorneys at Law, located at 625 Route 6 in Mahopac. He can be reached at alandfeller@sloanandfeller.com.

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THERE’S A WORD FOR IT

A vocabulary-building quiz By Edward Goralski

Late in the Season. A snowy month of February is behind us. March is here, which means that we are most certainly in late winter. To mark where we are in the season, all the words in the quiz this week contain late in them. Do keep in mind that spring arrives later this month.

1. boilerplate (n.)	A) a sales call	B) a crisis point	C) ready-to-print copy
2. dilate (v.)	A) to make smaller	B) make larger	C) change color
3. plateau (n.)	A) a relatively stable level	B) a stated policy	C) empty talk
4. belated (adj.)	A) tardy	B) under an obligation	C) capable
5. emulate (v.)	A) to parody	B) disperse something	C) strive to excel
6. latent (adj.)	A) advantageous	B) hidden	C) most recent
7. palate (n.)	A) the sense of taste	B) an official residence	C) champion of a cause
8. adulate (v.)	A) to remove by erosion	B) make impure	C) praise excessively

ANSWERS:

1. C. Syndicated, or ready-to-print copy; also trite.
2. B. To make wider or larger; cause to expand
3. A. A relatively stable level; period, or state; also hidden
4. A. Having been delayed; done or sent too late;
5. C. To strive to equal or excel, especially through
6. B. Present or potential, but not evident or active;
7. A. The sense of taste; also the roof of the mouth
8. C. To praise or admire excessively; fawn on

My Pandemic Palate Continues to Expand



By Morris Gut

Since its founding by the Livanos family in 1994, City Limits Diner in White Plains has become a bustling mainstay along Central Avenue. We completed our COVID-19 vaccinations

last week at the County Center, so we decided to celebrate over a mid-morning meal across the street.

After major redesign and renovation in 2012, the popularity of this restaurant only grew, and we had not visited in a while. At about 10:30 a.m. the place was calm. Tables were well-spaced throughout the multilevel dining rooms in keeping with COVID protocols. We were seated at a comfortable booth.

Scanning the menu was appetizing. Just about everything sounded good, including breakfast, which is served all day. It was hard to decide, but I went for a cod fish sandwich served on a roll with a special house aioli (ask for extra aioli), lettuce and tomato. My companion wanted huevos rancheros. Both were satisfying. We shared the large serving of French fries that came with my order. It turned out to be a fine spot to reflect on our vaccine experience.

The Livanos family has brought us so many fine dining experiences through the years, including the upscale Moderne Barn in Armonk. We will be doing more tastings in coming months.

City Limits is located at 200 Central Ave. in White Plains. Open seven days. Info: 914-686-9000 or visit www.citylimitsdiner.com.

New Place for Falafel
Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food is the focus of Falafel Place, a new restaurant and takeout counter that just opened on Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains. The company, founded by Chef Ori Apple, has another unit on Yonkers' Central Park Avenue, and a group of restaurants in Manhattan that serve under the name Hummus Place.

Falafel and hummus in its various forms are prepared fresh daily along with pita sandwiches, classic shakshuka and a variety of meze. The menu states it is vegan, kosher and gluten-free. There aren't many outlets for these popular traditional staples in Westchester, so I hope it goes over well.

Falafel Place is located at 204 Mamaroneck Ave. in White Plains. Open seven days. Info: Visit www.falafelplaceny.com.

Brazilian Steakhouse to Open

There has been a lot of work going the past two years at the old landmark Bank of New York building on Main and Church



The cod fish sandwich and huevos rancheros at City Limits Diner.

streets in White Plains. Fogo de Chao, a major Brazilian Steakhouse chain with 40 restaurants across the U.S., Middle East, Brazil and Mexico, has been renovating this sprawling space for its flashy version of churrascaria BBQ.

If its restaurant on West 53rd Street in Manhattan is any indication, it will be a sparkling spot for drinks, giant Market Table salad bar and waves of fire-roasted meats served on skewers, churrasco style. If you've never experienced this type of dining concept, get ready and make sure you are hungry. It is similar to Texas de Brazil at Ridge Hill in Yonkers. The announced opening date is Mar. 23.

Along with the traditional meat offerings are a fresh daily seafood selection and a variety of fresh-made salads. There's also a sprawling bar and lounge where it's Happy Hour all day, seven days a week. The bar menu appears to be reasonably priced. There's also a butcher shop on the premises for take-home.

Fogo de Chao will be located at 235 Main St. in White Plains. Info: Visit www.fogodechao.com.

New Menu, Music Coming to Tauk

Restaurateur Anna Mallozzi took over Tauk Kitchen + Bar last year, the Montauk-seafood themed restaurant in Armonk, and we are told there are big changes on the way, including a new name. Her son, Jonathan Irizarry, is a chef at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. He plans to re-imagine the menu.

In the meantime, Mallozzi is jazzing up the bill-of-fare with a live keyboard on upcoming Saturday evenings Mar. 13 and 20. It could become a regular event.

The restaurant, at Armonk Square, is near DeCicco's Market. You can still

enjoy specialties such as bang bang shrimp, lobster cobb, fish and chips, Maine lobster roll, chicken francese and Fossil Farms' Imperial rib-eye steak. We'll keep you posted.

Tauk Kitchen + Bar is located at 402 Main St. in Armonk. Check ahead for hours of operation. Occasional live music. Free parking. Info: 914-730-1144. (A new website is in the works.)

'Searching for Italy' is Delicious

Peekskill-born actor Stanley Tucci stars in an appetizing new series on CNN entitled "Searching for Italy," a delicious romp through the scenic and delicious Italian culinary countryside. Beautifully filmed and depicted, Tucci visits various cities and towns throughout the boot zeroing in on the incredible food scene in each region.

In one episode he visits Rome and learns how to prepare the proper "vera" carbonara sauce. In another he watches how artichokes are prepared the traditional way in the old Jewish Quarter. My palate is longing for more episodes.

Tucci, who attended John Jay High School and SUNY Purchase, has long been a food and wine aficionado, having once owned a restaurant called Finch Tavern in Croton Falls. He also hosted a series called "Vine Talk" on PBS. His latest cookbook, "The Tucci Table: Cooking with Family and Friends," which he co-authored with his current wife Felicity Blunt, is available on Kindle.

Check out "Searching for Italy" at www.cnn.com/travel/article/stanley-tucci-searching-for-italy-restaurants/index.html.

Everyone is Irish on St. Paddy's Day!

The leprechauns are coming! St. Patrick's Day, Wednesday, Mar. 17,



Get ready for some churrasco-style barbecue at Fogo de Chao Brazilian Steakhouse, which is scheduled to open later this month in White Plains.



Falafel Place in White Plains serves Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food.

will be celebrated with all its local color. Throughout the region, towns and villages are hanging shamrocks on storefronts and homes giving the Hudson Valley its sparkling moment in the Emerald Isle.

If you want to partake in the traditional foods, spirits and reveling sprinkled with a good dose of blarney, I will be offering dining venue suggestions in my next column. Be sure to check ahead for special hours. Larger groups are advised to make reservations in advance. Takeout and delivery are also good options. Erin go Bragh!

Remember to follow COVID-19 protocols and stay safe!

Morris Gut is a restaurant consultant and former restaurant trade magazine editor. He has been tracking and writing about the food and dining scene in greater Westchester for over 30 years. He may be reached at 914-235-6591 or gutreaactions@optonline.net.

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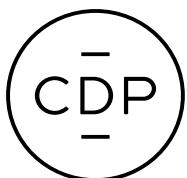
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